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## A PLEA AND PLAN FOR A COÖPERATIVE CHURCH PARISH SYSTEM IN CITIES.

IN the city is centering a larger and larger measure of the necessities and opportunities of social service, because the city continues to be what it has always been, qualitatively, in influence upon the ideals of the state, and because an enlarging proportion of the state's subjects are domiciling themselves in attached houses.

In the city, therefore—the magnetic, overcrowded, increasing city—social service finds its fields white for harvest, and anyone who knows his time must confess that goodness is showing great genius in the multiplicity of channels which it is digging for the flow of streams of service. Settlements, tax propagandas, labor bureaus, colonization movements, institutes, a host of helpfulnesses crowd the horizon as one tries to recount the new forms of altruism's applications.

It is an encouraging sign of the times that the church is not holding herself aloof from this generous humanitarianism. Genetically, of course, she is the mother of it. The genesis of the social conscience, as Professor Nash has so magnificently proven, has been at her altars. It cannot, therefore, but rejoice one who loves the Master of Nazareth, and who loves his kind, to see the new efflorescence of service to the hungry and naked, the sick, the criminal, and the forlorn.

But it must be confessed that primacy in altruistic movements is no longer conceded to the church as it used to be, and perhaps the fault lies, in a measure, at her own door. It is charged against her that the service she most enjoys is her ministry to those who support her, and that all her extraparochial work is due to a desire to make a "statistical showing" rather than to enthusiasm for humanity. This the writer does not concede, for he knows that much of the altruistic work of the

church is not statistically spectacular, but sacramental in spirit, "As unto the Lord and not unto men."

It is useless, however, to shut one's eyes to the fact that so long as the church remains the richest in material resources of the voluntary forces of social uplift, and so long as, in virtue of what she does, the state exempts her from taxation, every member of the state has the right to ask whether the service she renders is equal to the favor shown. Among friends of the church it is only, therefore, the advocate, fortunately rare in America, of her divine right to favor from the state who will not point out the modes in which she may so improve her social services as to leave her tax-exemption favor unquestioned now and unchangeable in years to come.

It is such an attempt that is made in the present article. Originated by the Holy One from one of the least cities of Judah, commissioned in Palestine's largest city, her literature christened with the names of the ancient world's greatest cities and city, her social ideal a city let down from heaven, the church has opportunity to take the primacy, beyond all question, in altruistic movements, by the institution of a coöperative parish system in cities.

The Federation of Churches and Christian Workers in New York City recently completed its second house-to-house inquiry into social and religious conditions in New York. The canvass embraced 4,800 families. One object, in the tabulation of the material gathered, was to ascertain the economy and efficiency of religiously cultural work as at present carried on in cities. It must be allowed that the showing made by the church is unsatisfactory.

The assessed valuation of church property in the ward in which the canvass was carried on, in 1896, was \$4,240,000; the assessed valuation of school property in the same area, \$1,993,000. Twice as much church property as school property, including parochial schools, was exempt from taxation.

Among the children from eight to sixteen years of age, however, in that portion of the city, there are only 638 children

—306 boys, 332 girls—out of public or private schools; whereas, of the same ages there are 708 children—376 boys, 332 girls—out of Sunday schools. From three to seven years of age the percentage of children out of public schools is 68.5, and out of Sunday schools 70.2. With the children of kindergarten age and the children of grammar school age, therefore, the state, through its compulsory education process, is doing better business than the church. It must be conceded that to the church, rather than to the public schools, the superior percentage of children of kindergarten age in kindergartens may be due; for, in the portion of the city canvassed, the kindergartens under the care of the board of education accommodate only half of the children attending kindergartens.

In this same region 3,709 male heads of households are wage-earners, and only 2,623 of them are church members. The factors of these totals do not absolutely correspond, but almost so, and it can be said, therefore, that only 70.7 per cent. of the wage-earning heads of households in the region are church members.

There are twenty-seven nationalities in the region canvassed, and when the numbers of wage-earners and church members in the various nationalities are studied, some very striking facts appear.

The number of Irish church members is larger than the number of Irish wage-earners, and the same is the case with the Canadians in the district. American heads of households who are church members are slightly in excess of the number of American fathers, wage-earners; and the Scotch, Austrians, Swedes, Danes, and Italians are all above the percentage of the entire district; while the English, German, Dutch, Swiss, Norwegian, Russian, Bohemian, and negro percentages are all below the average. Only 45.5 per cent. of German fathers, wage-earners, are church members; and that this is a fact of large moment to the church's place among social agencies in New York is evident when it is remembered that the Germans are New York's leading foreign nationality

There are statistics in the material gathered which abundantly prove that—either through its care for the religious culture of childhood, or through its special claims to league with supernatural forces, or through its magnificently devised and executed parish system—the Roman Catholic church is affecting the city more successfully than any other denomination. There are more Irish fathers church members than wage-earners, and 83.2 per cent. of Canadian fathers, wage-earners, are church members; whereas only 56.5 per cent. of English wage-earning fathers and 45.5 per cent. of German wage-earning fathers are church members. The first two nationalities are predominantly Romanist; the last two predominantly Protestant.

The church homes of the church-attending families in the district have been specially counted; and whereas the 2,575 Roman Catholic families are all housed—with the exception of twenty-two—in three churches, the 872 Protestant families claim ninety-one different church homes in the city. Twenty-two Baptist churches out of forty-seven on Manhattan island are attended by the Baptists, and these churches are scattered from One Hundred and Fifty-Sixth street to Waverly place—a reach of nine miles, and from Second avenue on the east to Amsterdam avenue on the west—a reach of over two miles. In all other Protestant denominations from one-sixth to one-half of the churches are claimed as the church homes of the people.

Notwithstanding the fact, however, that 20.6 per cent. of the pastors in New York city are giving attention to the church families in the district canvassed, 768 families out of 4,800 families have no church home, and 1,353 families have no church members.

It is evident that the families without members and places of worship are not Roman Catholic, for 97.5 per cent. of the Irish church families are Roman Catholic, and 96.4 per cent. of the Irish families of the entire district have a church home; while 76.9 per cent. of the American church families are Romanist, and 82.8 per cent. of all the American families have a church home; and but 57.33 per cent. of the German church families are

Roman Catholics, and only 67.1 per cent. of German families have a church home. That is to say, the nationalities that have the highest Romanist membership have the highest church relationship.

To put it differently, but equally truthfully, Protestantism is not holding the people as compared with Roman Catholicism. Three Roman Catholic churches claim the attendance of 2,553 out of 2,575 Roman Catholic families; 106 Protestant churches are attended by 867 families with church members, and 572 families without members, but there are 786 Protestant families that have neither members nor church homes.

Religious affiliations in individual houses show results similar to the *ensemble* of the district. In one house containing fifteen families three pastors have parishioners in nine families, leaving six families without pastors or church homes. An adjacent dwelling contains thirteen families, and four pastors visit seven families, but there are six other families, of three other denominations, in that house, who do not go to any church. Scores of houses among the 398 dwellings in which the 4,800 families live show similar conditions.

The conclusion is inevitable that Protestantism's families are not in Protestantism's churches because Protestantism's church representatives, attending to the people on their communion and pew rolls, scattered all over the 13,000 acres of Manhattan island, have not time or plan to discover and recover the families found on no communion or pew roll.

It should be a humiliation to Protestantism in New York that three Roman Catholic churches get at more families in the district than do ninety-five Protestant churches, among which are three resident churches. It is idle to ascribe the difference of efficiency in the district to denominational tendency, or national characteristics. It is rather due to the difference between regimentation and somnambulism. "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain," says Protestantism; and she goes on underestimating human wide-awakeness and gump-tion through her admirable reverence for divine grace. She

walketh in a dumb show of saving the city for herself or her Lord.

There are three ways of changing this situation, and increasing the social service to the city of Protestantism's millions of dollars of property exemption. Two of these plans have a history, but it is a history of failure in New York, and they failed because they were not fitted to facts.

One is to give to the neighborhood churches that combine to make a house-to-house canvass in any community a list of the families which would attend their respective churches, if attending any. This plan is not adapted to New York, because of physical obstacles. It is statistically possible, for instance, in the locality just canvassed, that the families assigned to the weakest denomination might, for the most part, live on the fourth floor of the tenements, and be scattered through more tenements than the families assigned to any other church. This would insure the failure of the plan. Moreover, a family living on the corner may move down the block before the church representative comes along, and so be missed. In any case it is certain that three years hence there will be practically a new set of tenants in the district's dwellings. The federation's canvass shows that the average residence in the New York tenements is three years. The Roman church will know her people among this new population, her machinery insures it; but Protestantism's acquaintance with the population has then to be made anew. The shifting special responsibility which this entails insures the ephemeral existence of any coöperative canvass that lapses into denominational care.

A more excellent way was proposed by the Evangelical Alliance in 1888, but it too failed, and failed, as I conceive, because too ideal and too unpractical.

The plan was that each pastor should select one able layman among each hundred members of his church to act as a supervisor of visitation, and ten members from each hundred members to act as visitors. In a church of five hundred members there would thus be five supervisors, fifty visitors; in five

churches of the same strength, twenty-five supervisors, two hundred and fifty visitors. Each of these visitors was to have charge of ten families, and visit them monthly, that is to say, two hundred and fifty people were to be making friendly calls on half as many families as those canvassed in the federation's recent study of about twenty-five blocks in New York city. Each supervisor was to have oversight of the work of visitors from each coöperating church, intermingling the denominations.

The super-ideality of this plan foredoomed it to failure. The congregation is rare in which one-tenth of the members are able or willing to give themselves to such work, a monthly visit on ten families. It is a plan made for a better army than Gideon's. The spirit of social service is stronger in the land today than it was ten years ago, but it is doubtful whether the present decade will witness average churches with the percentage of available altruists needed to carry out such a crusading calling plan. It is too ideal also in intermingling denominational visitors. The first step to be taken would seem to be to induce the churches to regard a geographical area as a special responsibility, and many a church would undertake this if, as a church, it were held responsible for the area, when it might not be willing to share the responsibility with workers from other churches. Spiritual life is systole and diastole indeed, both organization and individual discharging both organic functions at times, but if the church is a divine organization, we must concede her arterialism and assume that individuals are venous.

So far as New York's needs are concerned, however, the plan was subpractical also. In a tenement house of thirteen families, for instance, it would be absurd to leave the three families immediately under the roof to visitor B after visitor A had already reached the fourth floor. Visitor B, unless an extraordinary altruist and stair-scaler, would very soon overture visitor A to annex the attic. Would visitor A be willing so to extend exhausting work? Should the extension not be made in order to give unity to the work in that dwelling in matters sanitary and social? In a dwelling with twenty families, if one of visitor



A's families moved from the first floor to the fifth—and there have been sociological “anti-basement” clubs in New York city—would it not be better to have visitor A continue the friendly visiting, when acquaintance was just forming into friendship, than to have visitor B make a beginning? One-tenth of New York's Protestant church members, in 1890, that is, 17,000 people, could not visit, at ten families apiece, that is, 170,000 families, all of New York's families of that year, which were 312,866 in number. In these and other regards the Chickering Hall plan was subpractical for New York, and its practical elements must be inductively adapted wherever its ideality permits it to be adopted. Its superiority over the first plan is unquestioned, however, in that it approaches a geographical parish system, and combines the Protestant congregations in visitation.

The third plan is yet to make its history, and if it succeeds it will be another instance of the evolutionary order of social progress. If it fails, or is submitted to modifications before it is fitted to survive, none who have been concerned in formulating it will deny that God is in his world or in his church. All that they will say is that he is in his church as he is in his world.

The plan is, first of all, to induce the churches and charities of a region to make a house-to-house study of educational, evangelical, economic, and other conditions. The minuteness and extent of this inquiry will vary in different cities. The territory covered will vary. In New York it has embraced, so far, two regions, one as large as Utica, the other as large as Schenectady. In Schenectady a subregion as large as Fonda might suffice.

The result of such a study, which should be conducted by someone who has a measure of sociological training, will, it is felt, show, everywhere in America, a sadder state of social affairs than the Christian community knew to prevail. Out of this knowledge, if the situation is severely discouraging, the desire for coöperation in care will arise. When the Persians

were heading for Marathon, the Hellenic tribes got together and fought together against the invader. Christianity's warm heart will say to her cool head, when she sees that her alms and uplift must be with both left hand and right hand: "Head, you must direct this business for me, or I shall fail in meeting this need. The Master himself did not feed the multitude by Galilee as a mob. He divided the five thousand into companies, and gave each of the twelve his sections to care for. And they did all eat and were filled, no one was overlooked. And they gathered up twelve baskets of fragments, a basket for each disciple, more food than they started with. Head, this need is so great that some hungry one is sure to be underfed, and some greedy one is sure to be overfed, unless there is method." And when Christianity talks in this strain, it will not indicate a cooling heart, but a glowing one, one that responds to the Redeemer's desire, and

"mind and soul, according well,  
Will make one music as before."

The method of permanent coöperation, like the character of the canvass, will vary with locality. But a geographical area, assigned to a church, as a permanent *special* parish, is the unit idea. An area rather than a lot of families, because that area will be permanently occupied with homes. They may not be the same homes; there may be more or fewer. In New York, alas! one must think there will usually be more. The assignment to a church rather than to a supervisor with varying visitors:

1. Because this permits the best permanent portraiture of each fraction of the area over which coöperation extends, each fraction being viewed by one supervising eye.
2. Because a church can thus employ its energies in any way its minister and members have the genius and grace to devise and execute. Emulation is thus conserved, coöperation is not endangered.
3. Because it involves the minimum of work, which is a Christian and not a Satanic reason.
4. Because it permits important social work to be done in addition to purely religious work, as in the church district plan of the Charity Organiza-

tion Society of Buffalo, by which the destitute in specific districts are cared for by the churches to which these districts are assigned.

5. Because it is the voluntary revival of a plan which was successful when compulsory, viz., in the established churches of England and Scotland.

6. Because in many places individual parishes are now carrying on special work in this way, in addition to their ministry to those who support them, *e. g.*, Grace Episcopal Church, New York, and whenever coöperation is instituted, this individual work can be continued in boundary and coördinated with outside agencies without disturbance.

Given, then, a block or two blocks to be the special geographical area assigned a coöperating church, what is the coöperative duty and what the special duty of that church? The special duty will vary according to the traditions and social attitudes of the denominations and churches concerned; the coöperative duty will vary in the cities of the land and in different sections of the same city, but the following concerns of a coöperative parish system in New York city may serve for guidance elsewhere:

1. Acquaintance on the part of the church with the sanitary condition of the dwellings in assigned blocks. In one block recently canvassed in New York city, containing 3,580 people, there are only fifty-nine dwellings. As work is at present carried on in New York, no altruistic agency entering any of these dwellings has an accurate idea concerning them. A pastor who visits people on the first floor, where the air is vitiated by street odors, may think the house unsanitary, and libel the dwelling by this hastily formed conclusion. A pastor who visits on the fifth floor may think the house healthy, and over-compliment the sanitary condition. When, however, a church's visitor goes through a whole dwelling, from the first floor to the fifth, an accurate estimate of its condition can be made, and, in the coöperative parish plan in New York, is to be made. All dwellings that are below the legal standard are to be listed, and the coöperating churches, through someone appointed in the matter, will communicate directly with the board of health when the law is violated.

2. The coöperating churches will become agents to extend attendance upon the public schools. For this reason they will enter homes where the families already have a church home. They will inquire whether the children are attending school as the law suggests. If not, they will urge compliance with it in the interest of the children, and if compliance is impossible for economic reasons, communication will be had with the charities of the city which exists for the purpose of assisting such cases.

3. Coöperating churches will advance the interests of the Sunday school throughout the district. If children are not in Sunday school, their attendance at some Sunday school of the locality will be urged. The visitation being coöperative, an invitation can be extended in the name of all the Sunday schools in the locality. The state has its attendance officers to compel the attendance of all children of legal public school age; the church, through a coöperative parish system, will have its attendance officers to invite the children in every assigned area to avail themselves of ethical and spiritual education. It is only through some such plan as this that the church can hope to do as good a business in education as the state.

4. The coöperating churches will urge families to avail themselves of neighborhood libraries, industrial classes—such as cooking classes, sewing schools, etc.—and the penny provident banks. The churches should be familiar with the plans for evening schools in the neighborhood, and acquaint the people with them. Every agency of social uplift in the immediate locality should be known to the churches that enter into a coöperative parish plan, and should be brought to the acquaintance of the families. The agencies that afford relief should *not* be advertised from house to house, for this would undoubtedly create extra pauperism. Far from increasing the pauperism of their special parishes, coöperating churches should endeavor to diminish it by interchanging a list of their beneficiaries and communicating with the Charity Organization Society if they discover duplication of alms. The “statistical showing” weakness of churches is still sometimes apparent in the records of their

eleemosynary work, despite the check on hurtful charity by the creation of charity organization societies.

5. The churches will, of course, endeavor to connect each family with a church home. If a visiting church finds a family with no denominational preference, it, of course, will be its privilege and duty to connect that family with itself. If it finds, however, families unattached, with a denominational tendency, it will equally be its duty to direct that family toward a church of its denomination in the neighborhood.

In the fifteenth and seventeenth assembly districts of New York work of the above nature has already been commenced, and, in order to help the coöperating churches in that locality—a subfederation called Auxiliary “A”—the federation of the churches of the city has published a calendar, giving full information concerning the tenement-house laws; the public schools, with their evening branches; the libraries; the museums; the penny provident banks; the day nurseries; the churches, with their guilds and clubs, throughout the entire district. Copies of this calendar have been placed in every one of the 20,000 families included in the area. The federation provided some special leaves in this calendar for foreigners, written and printed, of course, in their own language. The main idea was to give information and invitation, in the name of Christ, concerning every uplifting agency supported by taxation and every uplifting agency carried on by the voluntary contributions of church and charitable people. The nineteenth and twenty-first assembly districts will be similarly organized within a month—a total population of 200,000.

The churches that have entered into this coöperative parish system have special committees, whose purpose is to serve the neighborhood so as to increase the prevalence of the idea that the church is there, not to be served by the people, but to serve them. For instance, the committee on parks recently circulated a petition, signed by every one of the pastors in the area, asking the city authorities to locate a small park in the region. When the park is actually opened, it cannot but advertise throughout

the whole neighborhood the fact that the church is interested in the people's physical well-being. There is a committee on public schools which will undoubtedly urge the extension to the locality of the kindergarten system of the city. Similarly, according to the needs of the various localities of New York, and of other cities in which such a coöperative parish system is instituted, the churches should have their committees on various social interests, and a regular meeting of the church representatives should discuss methods of work as adapted, not to the Christian world in general, but to that particular locality.

Thus, in addition to the desultory, however beneficial, work now carried on by the Protestant churches in cities, the Federation of Churches and Christian Workers in New York City proposes to add a definite, special, evangelical and sociological work.

It is useless for Protestantism to attempt to institute a parish system along the lines of Roman Catholicism. It is a mistake, however, to suppose that the Roman Catholic parish system threatens with excommunication anyone living within definite parish limits who attends a church without them. Quantities of Roman Catholics hire pews across the parish boundary lines. The parish plan for which the writer pleads does not contemplate the limitation of the attendance of the people of any Protestant denomination to a Protestant church of that especial neighborhood. Individuation is one of the best outcomes of Protestantism, and it cannot be conserved by forcing a man with a Doric soul to worship in a Gothic church, or a man with a mystical temperament to attend the ministrations of a preacher preaching always from the book of Numbers. If, however, the duty of the church to minister to those who support her is conceded and conserved, cannot, at the same time, a ministry to the city and to humanity—a common duty of Doric and Gothic churches—be conjointly carried on? If the consequence of ministry to individuals, without ministry to neighborhood, is such a statistical showing as the recent canvass of the federation shows in New York, can a better plan than a coöperative parish system be

devised to restore to the church her primacy in altruistic work? Church property erected on land which might be the site of homes and mills and stores, exempted from taxation, is not doing its duty to the locality in which it stands if its ministry is scattered all over the city, without specially serving its geographical neighborhood. Downtown churches in abundance in New York have moved uptown simply because they have been carried on to minister to the people supporting them. There is just as much ground for a graduated church tax—graduated in proportion to the social service it renders—as for a graduated income or inheritance tax.

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